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THE MENACE OF PAN-ISLAMISM

BY ALBERT EDWARDS

THIS story is making the rounds of the British army messes. An official report on the matter is, doubtless, on file in the archives of the War Office in London.

The scene was a military post in the Sudan. There were half a dozen white officers and their families, a company of English soldiers for use as a model, twenty extra "drill sergeants," and a regiment of native troops. They were the "Fuzzy Wuzzies" of Kipling's verse plus several years of drill and armed with modern rifles instead of spears. Outside the barracks there was a cluster of squalid mud huts and beyond miles and miles of desert, the killing African sun—the unspeakable heat.

One day a native private ran amuck. Perhaps it was the heat, perhaps he had been drinking infidel alcohol, or it may be that something snapped in his brain. With all the vivid invective of the East he began to insult an English captain who chanced to be crossing the parade-ground. Why should a follower of the Prophet take orders from an infidel slave? The day was approaching when the Inglesi dogs would be driven into the sea. The land would be cleaned of their pollution. Were not the lives of the handful of white men in the keeping of the soldiers? Were not all the regiment members of The Snoussia? Sworn to the Holy War of Extermination? Did not the Great Sheik promise that the day was at hand?

Intoxicated by his own anger, the mad Arab attacked his officer, wounded him slightly, might have killed him if he had not been overpowered by some English soldiers and dragged to the guard-house.

That night at mess the officers discussed the matter. The

younger ones dismissed it as "a touch of the sun." But all agreed that a summary example must be made of the "nigger" who had struck a white officer. It is not on record what the native soldiers said as they discussed the incident.

In the morning a court-martial was mustered in state. Every one was in dress uniform, all the flags were up, for ceremony is supposed to impress the "native" mind. The English company was drawn up behind the bargee where the court sat. The native soldiers were ordered to their barracks to watch English justice from a respectful distance. When the stage was properly set word was sent to bring out the culprit. As he was being led across the parade-ground, between two English soldiers, a shot rang out from a window in "C" Barrack. The bullet went through the prisoner's head, killing him instantly. The English officers and all the company of English soldiers had seen the puff of smoke from a particular window. The fifty native soldiers in that room solemnly swore that their officers' eyes had deceived them. They took Allah to witness and swore by the beards of their fathers that no shot had been fired from their room. An examination showed that a gun-rack had been forced—one of the rifles was still hot. The natives, however, insisted that there was some mistake. The rifle which had been used belonged to a private who was detailed as gardener to the colonel's wife. At the time of the murder he had been docilely pulling up weeds under her direction.

One of this half-company of Mohammedans had fired that shot; all must have seen it done, but all with one accord stubbornly denied any knowledge of the matter. And there the mystery rests!

There is only one plausible explanation—the consequences of which no one is willing to accept. All of those men may have been members of the great secret order of the Snoussia; its rulers may punish with death any one who reveals its plans. Its discipline may be so perfect that all that half-company were willing to submit to severe punishments rather than tell what they knew. But if this half-company were Snoussia, how about the rest of the company, how about the rest of the garrison? And how about the other Mohammedan regiments under English officers in the Sudan, in India, in Egypt, Algeria, and Tunisia? This

chance—that Europe's colonial troops may be disloyal—is the menace of Pan-Islamism.

Hardly a day passes that the newspapers of Europe do not contain much information on this subject. In one issue of a London daily I found half a column on the Mohammedan unrest in India, the report of a Pan-Islamic conference in Egypt, a despatch from Russian Turkestan about a fanatic who had been arrested for preaching the Holy War, and an official French telegram from Lake Tchad about a new "general order," intended by the military authorities to discourage some agitators of the Order of Derkawa who were stirring up trouble among the blacks of that district. A Paris paper of the same date reported that "The Mad Hamdushi," whom the police had been seeking for several months along the southwest border of Algeria, had been found dead in a village near Taza. The Italian raid in the Tripolitaine and the recent overwhelming defeat of the Turks have revived the subject. Most of the European reviews have published articles relating to it. But it is only by going to the native press, to the Arabic publications, and by study of the countries affected that one can get a general idea of motives back of all these diverse manifestations.

Broadly speaking, Pan-Islamism is the idea of uniting all the followers of Mohammed. But for what purpose? By what means? Before these questions the dream of unity at once breaks down. There are three distinct and mutually hostile elements in the Pan-Islamic movement.

First there is the Mohammedan "Old Guard." They have been entirely unimpressed by modern history. They are intellectual reactionaries, who have learned nothing and have forgotten all that knowledge which once made them powerful, all the science and art which was the glory of the Great Caliphs. The "black" ecclesiastical coterie at Rome is wildly progressive compared to them. They are true to the old traditions which destroyed the library at Alexandria twelve centuries ago. All the truth of the world is in the Koran; everything not in that sacred book is false.

Like all fanatics, they are visionary. They take no thought of practical ways and means. They attribute the decline of Islam to the sins of the people. If they would only return to the primitive purity of their religion, Allah

would draw his sword and the career of conquest which marked the early days of Mohammedanism would return. Their only weapon is faith.

The headquarters of this faction—it has no definite organization—is in Mecca. There every year pilgrims from the ends of the earth come under the influence of these fanatics. And emissaries from this center are abroad through all the length and breadth of Islam. It is a passionate missionary crusade such as the world has not seen for centuries. The apostles of this revival beg their way in poverty and in the face of great suffering along the tracks to China, Siberia, India, the Sudan, Central Africa, and Morocco. Everywhere the people receive them as holy men and listen to their preaching with awe. No man can judge the extent of their influence. It is easy to dismiss them as ignorant fanatics. But the world has seen many momentous things done in the name of Ignorance and Fanaticism.

The second faction of the Pan-Islamists is as far removed from the first as one group of men well could be from another group. Its inspiration comes from the “Europeanized” Mohammedans. Its leaders have studied in the Sorbonne, at Oxford, or at least in one of the many European schools which have been established in the Levant. Most of them are—although they might not admit it—Free Thinkers. They have lost their faith in the divine Mission of Mohammed, but they consider that some religion is necessary for the masses, and they prefer the undiluted Monotheism of their fathers’ creed to any of the more hazy theologies of Europe. In the same way, although they have been taught to see the stupidities and abuses of their own civilization, they prefer them to abuses and stupidities of ours. They dream of rejuvenating the lands of Islam after the manner of the Japanese. They would break down the dead traditionalism which smothered the intellectual life of their people; they would restore the great days of Bagdad and Granada and graft upon this ancient glory a few such modern conveniences as sanitary sewer systems and railroads. The best of the Egyptian and Indian “Nationalist” movements, the cream of the Young Turks and of the Persian “Constitutionalists” belong to this faction. Although some of their followers now and then throw a bomb, they are men of thought rather than of action. It is by reason and not by violence that they hope to realize their

dream. They have no hostility toward Christian nations, and, once their own independence was gained, they would hope for cordial relations with peoples of other creeds.

Disinterested observers—that is, practically every one but colonial administrators—sympathize with this group of Pan-Islamism. They are the leaven of progress in the Mohammedan world. Unfortunately they have received a serious blow in the utter collapse of the Young Turk movement. The inability of their followers in the Ottoman Empire to govern wisely has discredited them everywhere, has given a new argument to European colonialists in their contention that the Mohammedans are unfit to manage their own affairs.

The other section of the Pan-Islamic movement is less clear-cut in outline. It is marked by a bewildering mixture of crude fanaticism, mysticism, and European culture. Its partisans differ from the first group in their keen interest in such practical things as rifles and military training; from the second in the sincerity of their religious life and in their belief in the arbitrament of war. The writings of the Egyptian Nationalists bear a marked resemblance to, are full of quotations from, the pamphlets of the French Encyclopedists. The Order of The Snoussia—to which the mad native soldier of the English garrison referred—is the standard-bearer of this third faction, and the book of its founder resembles nothing in the literature of Christendom except some of the writings of the medieval Anabaptists and the more frenzied of the Russian Mystics. There are pages on end given to the description of the various stages of ecstasy which lead to the desired consummation of complete oneness with God. In the first stage the adept will see seven million green stars of surpassing loveliness; in each succeeding stage there will be different colored stars, until in the final stage before reaching the ultimate bliss of oblivion the disciple beholds constellations of a glory for which there are no mortal words. It is difficult to find anything in the volume which is really intelligible to a Westerner.

And yet the Snoussia—one of the youngest of the religious orders—is the strongest. Founded in 1848, it has already distanced all other similar organizations and is growing apace. It unquestionably owes its popularity to the wide-

spread belief that it is making practical preparations for the Holy War.

So far at least the differences in ideals of these factions have prevented any united action. And there can be no real Pan-Islamism until these differences are dissolved or until one faction swallows up the other two.

From the point of view of immediate politics the colonial administrators of North Africa and India are most interested in this last section of Pan-Islamists, who are not only talking about a militant rebirth of Mohammedanism, but are also actively preparing for it. But it is very hard to get credible information. The only sure fact is that no infidel knows with any certainty what is happening. The French in North Africa are divided into two camps: those who believe that a Holy War is a serious and imminent menace and those who scoff at the idea. The subject is taboo in the military clubs because it almost always precipitates a quarrel. The "believers" call the "scoffers" "blind fools" and are answered by the epithet "timorous." My personal experience leads me to believe that the majority of the French who have lived long enough in the country to know the language do not scoff. They may not lose sleep over the specter, they may not—very few do—believe that Pan-Islamism will triumphantly drive the French flag from Africa, but they do not scoff at the possibility of serious trouble.

There is the same difference of opinion among the English officers and administrators in Egypt, but the question is not so bitter among them. Their unquestioning faith in "Anglo-Saxon luck" keeps them from worrying. "We put down the Sepoy rebellion in India," one of them told me, "we smashed Mahdi, and we can do it again." But the reconquest of India was a horribly expensive thing, and Gordon was not the only Englishman whose life was lost before they smashed the Mahdi. But the English are so used to living on the edge of a volcano that they have lost the habit of worry.

In North Africa the question of Pan-Islamism is wrapped up in the development of the religious fraternities. The Snoussia, to which reference has been made, is the most powerful, but it is only one of a hundred. These secret orders are in a way heterodox. There is nothing about them in the Koran. "There is no God but God" was the

formula of Mohammed. Again and again in different phraseology he repeated the assertion that God has no partners. He claimed for himself the mission of prophet, but he always insisted that he was a man like other men. He did not offer to act as intermediary; he established no clergy. The religious life he taught was a direct, personal relation between the individual and the Deity. But very few people feel themselves pure enough or sufficiently brave to go alone before the tribunal of God. Intercessors seem to be a human necessity. And so—just as the cult of the Virgin grew up within Christianity—innumerable saints have appeared in Islam.

The more revered ones became—at first unintentionally—the founders of orders. The oldest of all is the Khaderiā. Unley-Abdel-Khader, who lived in the twelfth century of our era, was a holy mystic, bearing a close resemblance in his practice and teaching to St. Francis d'Assisi. He did not seek nor expect the canonization which succeeding generations gave him. But from the small group of his disciples grew a great order. It has divided and subdivided, but in almost every Islamic community there are some who hold the name of Unley-Abdel-Khader in almost idolatrous veneration. The same thing has repeated itself again and again. The great majority of the present-day Moslems find the reality of their religious life in one or another of the orders.

Most of them have a somewhat similar organization. In the mother chapter, generally built about the tomb of the founder, the Sheik of the order has his headquarters. Frequently a lineal descendant of the saint, the Sheik always claims to share his Baraka, or divine blessing. He rules a court not unlike that of the Vatican, one minister having charge of the doctrines, another of propaganda, a third of finance, and so forth. Affiliated chapters, or Zawias, are scattered as widely as possible and each is ruled by a Mok-kadem. He is always a man under the personal influence of the Sheik and stands before the local brethren as his half-divine representative. Every effort is used to incite the generosity of the members. Perhaps one-third of the funds collected goes to the support of the local Zawia, one-third sticks to somebody's fingers, and the rest goes up to the central treasury.

However, it is impossible to generalize about these orders.

No two are alike in doctrine or practice. The Tidjanîa have made peace with the Mammon of Infidel Unrighteousness. The present Sheik, whose headquarters are in Algeria, is practically a French official. He openly wears the cross of the Legion of Honor. During the last winter he traveled extensively in Morocco. Nominally on a pastoral visit, in reality he was sent by the French to urge his Moroccan followers to accept the protectorate without resistance. Most of the Tidjanîa are men of consequence. As far as I can discover it is more of a rich man's club than a religious order. Unley Ali, the present Shareef of Wassan and the head of the Tabbîa order, was educated in a French school in Algiers and speaks most easily the language of his mother—an Englishwoman. The French are also relying on his great influence in the difficult task of pacifying Morocco. The Derkawa, who in Morocco represent the extreme fanaticism of the Mecca coterie and who preach not only war against the infidel, but revolt against all corrupt Moslem governments who have made peace with the Christians, have practically no treasury. They do not beg except for food, and refuse money. They devote themselves entirely to religious propaganda. They seem insane, but they certainly are not mercenary. The Snoussîa, on the other hand, have developed as efficient a money-raising system as was ever invented. Their Mokkadems are expert blood-suckers. It means financial ruin to join this order. But it is growing more rapidly than any other. The people believe that the money goes to prepare for the war against the infidel.

Naturally, the colonial governments have spent much money and energy trying to inform themselves about this threatening order of Snoussîa. But very little is known. The first Sheik—Si Mohammed ben Si Ali ben Snoussi—was a strange mixture of the apparently idiotic mysticism of his writings and of great practical organizing ability. He founded the mother chapter in the Tripolitaine and his following grew rapidly; the more devout of his recruits emigrated from Egypt and Tunisia—polluted by infidel governments—and in the desert hinterland of Tripoli dug wells and founded communities about these artificial oases. As far back as the Mahdist uprising in the Sudan, which resulted in the death of Gordon, the Snoussîa were a power to be reckoned with. Even the Iron Earl of Cromer heaves

a sigh of retrospective relief when he reaches the place in his memoirs where the old Sheik refused to join forces with the Mahdi. Two sons have succeeded to the control of the order. The one who carries on the quasi-diplomatic relations with Europeans is said to be a sensual weakling, enervated by debauch, and frankly cynical about religion. It is impossible to get definite information about the other brother, who, according to native rumor, is the real head of the order.

It is also known from circumstantial evidence that the Snoussia encourages its members to enlist in the native regiments and get training in the ways of European warfare, and that a constant pilfering of arms and ammunition goes on in almost every native regiment. There are, I think, very few police officers in Egypt or Tunisia who would question the statement that the Snoussia could put into the field "several" thousand troops, drilled by European officers, abundantly supplied with arms and ammunition, and supported by some artillery. How many thousand? Two? Ten? Twenty? It is only a guess.

So much is known about this vast secret society. The rest is conjecture. For more definite information, for answers to the thousand questions this little knowledge stirs, there are nothing but native sources. The Mohammedans who are not members know no more about the order than the infidels do, and the members will not tell. But there are abundant rumors.

Two army officers—one French, one English—have shown me on the map the spot in the unexplored desert along the Egyptian-Tripolitaine border where they believed the Snoussia have their principal depot of arms. So far no European has penetrated to this oasis. The mystery of Mecca has been dissipated by Christian explorers, but this alleged stronghold of the Snoussia has not yet been visited. Perhaps it does not exist. But many sober-headed people believe that it does. I have often heard the story—supported by the best reputations for veracity—of strange rifles which are sometimes found in the interior. High-power, modern repeating rifles which do not bear the trademark of any European manufacturer. Native rumor says that there is a great arsenal in this mysterious oasis where Mohammedan graduates of Western technical schools are manufacturing arms and ammunition against the great day.

It sounds like a fairy story—from Japan. This fact, however is sure: no one knows the military strength of the Snoussia.

But this is not the real danger. Supposing that these rumors are facts, that the mysterious brother of the "official" Sheik of Snoussia should proclaim the Jihad and produce an army of fifty thousand well-drilled, well-equipped fanatical soldiers. It would undoubtedly be a serious affair, but not beyond the power of either England or France. The burning question is, How far can the native troops be trusted? Would the Egyptian troops march against the new Mahdi? Would the superb Spahis, who make so gay a show before the Government House in Algiers, obey their infidel officers? If they simply mutinied passively, it would be bad enough. But if they marched off to join their brothers in revolt, it would be the worst catastrophe Europe has ever faced.

However, it is certain that the overwhelming majority of European residents of North Africa do not fear the Holy War. They find an element of safety in the very number of religious orders. "The Dominicans and Jesuits never hated one another the way these rival Mohammedan sects do," one man told me. He was a Syrian Christian, educated in the Mission College in Beirut; he had traveled widely in Europe and was at the time editing an Arabic newspaper in Tangiers, which was subsidized by the French Government and almost entirely boycotted by the Moors. Arabic was his native tongue; he had mastered the Moorish dialect and so was in a position to know what he was talking about. He told me at length of the bitter jealousy between the rival Sheiks; he was sure that there was no chance of their uniting. And even more important than their mutual hatred was—he thought—their venality. He told me the amounts which the French Secret Service is paying annually to some of the "saints" in return for their political support.

"Europeans cannot understand these people," he said; "they are utterly corrupt. At least the aristocracy is—the leaders. And the common people are utterly ignorant. They have no feeling of nationality—nothing like what you call 'patriotism.' They have only a vague, superstitious fanaticism. Pan-Islamism?" He shrugged his shoulders in contempt. "If all their spiritual leaders united in pro-

claiming the Jihad, the people would follow them without doubt. But I tell you they hate one another too much. There is no 'communion of saints' in Islam; they send one another poison. And then most of them are for sale. If a new Mahdi sprang up, he would attract attention at once. If he could not be bribed, he would be suppressed, and it would be one of the big Sheiks whose prestige was threatened by the upstart who would hand him over to the Europeans. But there will never be a new Mahdi. It is cheaper and simpler to buy them before they gather enough followers to fight.

"Then there is the question of language. Turks and Persians and the Arabic-speaking people will never unite. Even Arabic is not one language. Here in North Africa alone there are dozens of dialects—a Moor can't understand an Algerian. The only really warlike people are the Berbers of the mountains. Their language is not even remotely related to Arabic. Besides, the Mohammedans as a people are unarmed. The rifles they buy from gun-runners are low grade and inside of a year are too rusty to work.

"They are split up into little tribes, with all the jealousy of tribal organization, different dialects and customs, rival Caïds. There is no more political or racial unity than there is of religious unity. Pan-Islamism is a story to frighten children. The Mussulmans are corrupt to the core—it is their religion. Every leader, Cadis, Ulema, Caïds, and Marabouts—all are for sale."

As he finished his statement—we were seated at a café table in the Socco Chico of Tangier—one of the begging brothers of the Derkawa passed through the crowded, multi-colored market-place crying aloud with monotonous repetition the name of God. If ever any people in the world looked "disinterested," it is these apostles of old Islam. His rags were not affected, his holy poverty was real. He looked a lineal descendant of the hermit saints of the Thebaid. The light of insanity—or of an overmastering religious faith—was in his eyes.

"Can you buy that man?" I asked.

"He probably is not worth it. If he has been in town two hours, the police know all about him. If he cannot be bought, well, look." He pointed across the way to a grizzled, sun-baked French officer who was sitting in another café reading the latest paper from Paris.

“ You mean,” I said, “ that if you cannot buy him you can kill him?”

“ Pooh!” he replied, contemptuously. “ It is seldom necessary to do more than scare them.”

This I think is a typical expression of the optimistic, most common attitude—a contempt for the native and great faith in the military power of Europe. But there is always the other side to be remembered; the earnest, serious men who are not optimistic about it.

All that can be learned from talking with Europeans of North Africa is that a serious and vehement difference of opinion exists about the danger of a Pan-Islamic revolt. The crux of the matter is the question of whether or not the varied tribes of the Mohammedan world, speaking different dialects and languages and the varied religious sects, with their rival leaders, can unite. It certainly does not seem probable. But less than a twelvemonth ago a man who is supposed to be exceedingly well informed on European diplomacy, who for years has been an authority on the Near East, told me that the national jealousy between Servia and Bulgaria was so great that there was not the remotest chance of a Balkan federation!

It is rather appalling to think out what a Pan-Islamic revolt would mean. A new Sepoy rebellion from the Red Sea to the Atlantic. A score or more of isolated European garrisons in Egypt, Tunisia, Algeria, and Morocco besieged by the same wave of fanatic courage which overwhelmed Gordon. The seaports around the coast from Suakin to Mogador would be dependent not only for protection, but also for food, on the European navies. The necessity of relieving the inland garrisons would imply the speedy organization of a dozen odd military expeditions, at least as large as that which Kitchener led—too late—to Khartoum.

What would the Powers of Europe do in the face of such a crisis? Mohammedanism is too threatening in India to allow the withdrawal of troops from that quarter. England would be dependent on her minute home army and what help she could draft from her Anglo-Saxon colonies. Russia would be kept more than busy with her own immense Mohammedan population, her Persian and Turkish frontiers. France, with her great North-African empire, would be denuded of troops. It would bankrupt her. England might

weather the storm in India and Egypt. But for France it is a simple matter of arithmetic. For the years between the bombardment of Casablanca and the establishment of the protectorate last year, France has been spending fifteen thousand dollars a day on her military operations in Morocco alone, and in that period there was very little serious fighting. A war from Tunis to Tangier—a real war—would be inevitable bankruptcy.

And the balance of power in Europe? Germany and Austria alone of the great nations would be unaffected by a Mohammedan revolt. With the military power of her chief rivals strained to the utmost, could Germany be expected not to attempt to gain her coveted “place in the sun”? A wide-spread Holy War might well mean the bankruptcy of Europe.

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